

CHAPTER 17

HOUSE FORM AND FAMILY ARRANGEMENT

ROLAND FLETCHER*

Introduction

The diagrams in this paper have been provided as illustrations of the house forms associated with some of the family arrangements discussed in the papers of this collection. The houses are described as particular examples, without generalisation to other houses of their community or to the overall situation in each society. However, each house can be regarded as an arrangement of structures and personnel acceptable to the attitudes of its community concerning house form and family organization. The members of all the households described were accepted and recognised members of their community.

Location and Character of the Settlements

The term "house" is used to refer to a discrete structural unit or group of units where the independence of the house is recognised on the basis that one person is primarily responsible for decisions about the upkeep of the unit or group of units. A house will tend to be structurally distinct from any adjacent house, the upkeep of which is another person's responsibility.

The example of a Fante house (fig. 1) was collected in the village of Akotekyere near the University of Cape Coast. I obtained the plan of the Ashanti house (fig. 4) in Agogo to the east of Kumasi. The two plans of the Ewe houses (figs 7 and 10) come from the village of Aduklu Kpatove, which lies to the south of Ho. Agogo is a community of approximately 40,000 people, while Aduklu Kpatove and Akotekyere conform to the conventional notion of a village, both in the number of houses and the density of housing. Of the two villages, Aduklu Kpatove is the larger, consisting of 60 to 70 houses.¹

*Mr. Fletcher was formerly a member of the Department of Archaeology, Legon.



Fig 1 Fante House Akotekyerɛ. Near Cape Coast

Housing density is high in all these communities but the route arrangements differ considerably. In Agogo the public routes pass around the houses, even if the house consists only of one building with an open court in front. The extreme segregation of public and private routes for an Ashanti house is seen in fig. 4 where the courtyard is also visually exclusive. In Akotekyere most routes pass between the houses, but courts are more accessible both visually and as through routes. It is quite difficult to distinguish public and private routes in Aduklu since the open space used by a house is generally visible and main pathways frequently pass through these areas (Rapoport, 1969:80).

Character of the House

Both sundried bricks and swish were used in the construction of the houses illustrated. Apart from the main structures of the Ewe house (fig. 10) and the small post built huts of both Ewe houses, all the structures illustrated have gabled, corrugated iron roofs. The small huts in the Ewe house are built of a post framework. Screens made from the midrib of the oil palm fronds are used to block the spaces between the post upright. These huts and the roof of the large huts in the Ewe house (fig. 10) have thatched, gabled roofs.

The east wall of the rooms on the eastern side of the Ashanti house has collapsed. A temporary screening of corrugated iron sheets and timber has been built. The posts marked on the plan, in those rooms, were put in to hold up the roof. Such posts are not therefore a standard part of an Ashanti house.

It should be noted that the room to the west of the kitchen in the Agogo house is an office and second bedroom for the man, who also has the rooms at the south-east corner of the court by the entrance. In the Akotekyere house the circular structure under the west verandah is an oven for drying fish. The owner of the Ewe house (fig. 10) has moved from a nearby village and is the owner of a lorry, which is parked at night in the northern portion of the court of his house. In choosing houses to illustrate the context of various family arrangements there is always the limitation that most houses contain an idiosyncratic feature, even though the house may be conformable in all its other attributes.

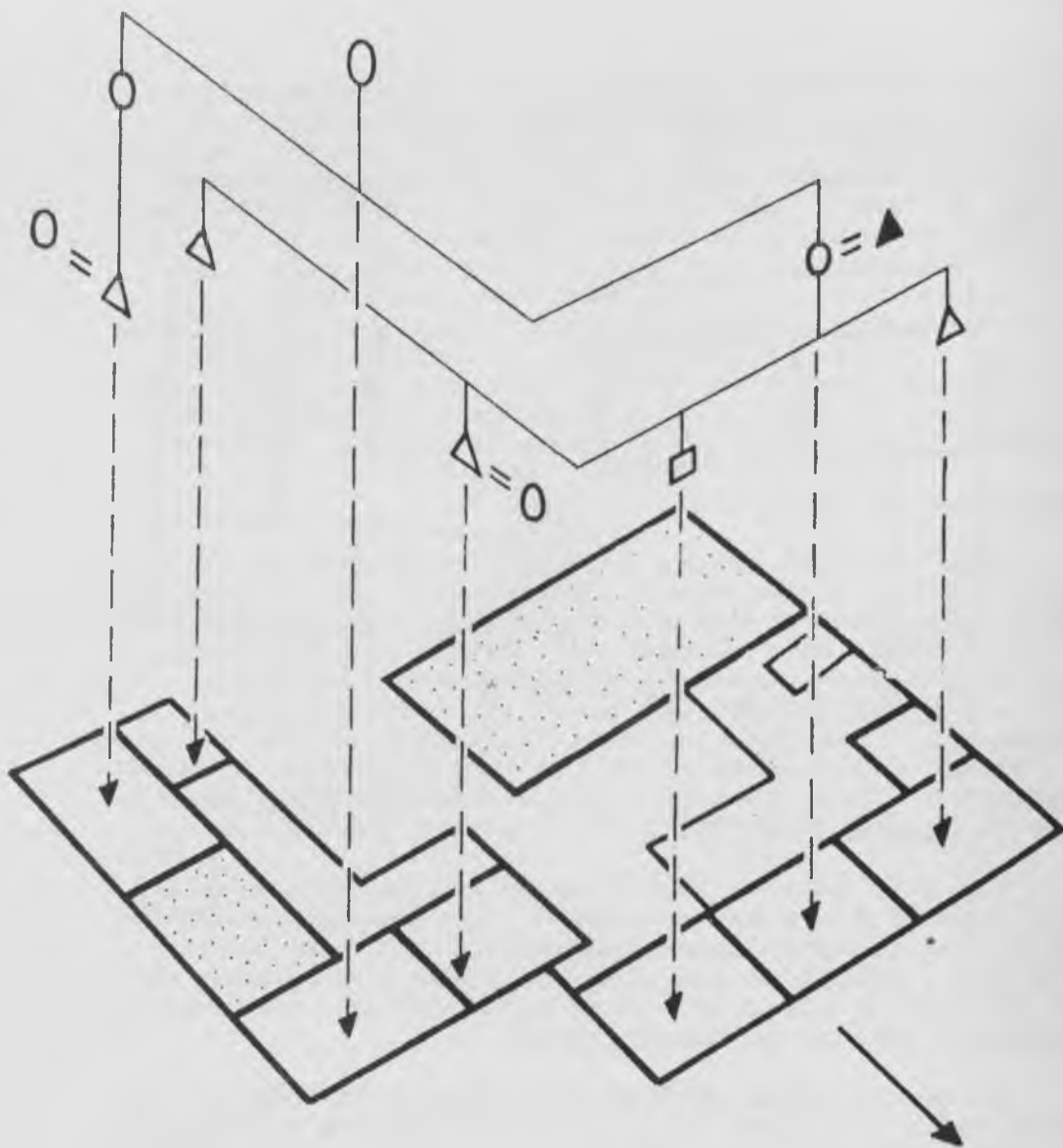


Fig 2. Location of Kin. Fante House (see Fig 1) Akotekyere
Schematic Block Diagram.

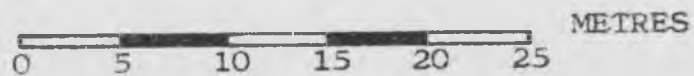


Fig 3. Development of Fante House. Akotekyere



Fig 4. Ashanti House Agogo, Ashanti Region

The use of space differs quite considerably between these houses. In the Agogo house the storage of bulk equipment is segregated from the kitchen. The store and kitchen are next to each other in the Akotekyere house. One hut is used as both kitchen and store in the Ewe houses. Though the Agogo house is structurally a self contained unit, its rubbish is removed to a communal dump. The Akotekyere house uses a series of dumps on the periphery of the village area, while in Aduklu Kpatove dumps occur both by the houses and at the edge of the village. In the more open plan of the Fante and Ewe houses, the baths are either separate from the main buildings or added to the end of one of the buildings. The bath in the Ashanti house forms part of the structure of the building, though it is visually segregated from the rest of the house in the north-east corner. Each house achieves visual segregation of the bath area, but seems to proceed from different basic notions about the arrangement of structures.

Location of Personnel

In the Aduklu Kpatove, Agogo and Akotekyere houses strangers occupy or use some of the rooms within the structural limits of the house (figs. 11,5,2, respectively). The strangers in Agogo are present for commercial reasons, while in the other houses the rooms are used by members of nearby academic institutions. In Aduklu Kpatove and Agogo the houses define their own area within which the personnel may live and work. The Akotekyere house depends upon an adjacent but independent house to define the south side of the inner court.

Change in location of personnel can occur for several reasons. In the next section I will describe changes due to increase in the number of people in the house. Other changes occur due to structural collapse, either obliging the occupant of the ruined room to move or, if that is not acceptable, requiring rapid repairs to the damaged room. In the Agogo house the mother of the owner of the house has moved from the northern ruined room on the east side of the house, to her present room at the south end. (fig. 5). The man who was described as the owner of the house, uses the room just to the north-east of his mother.

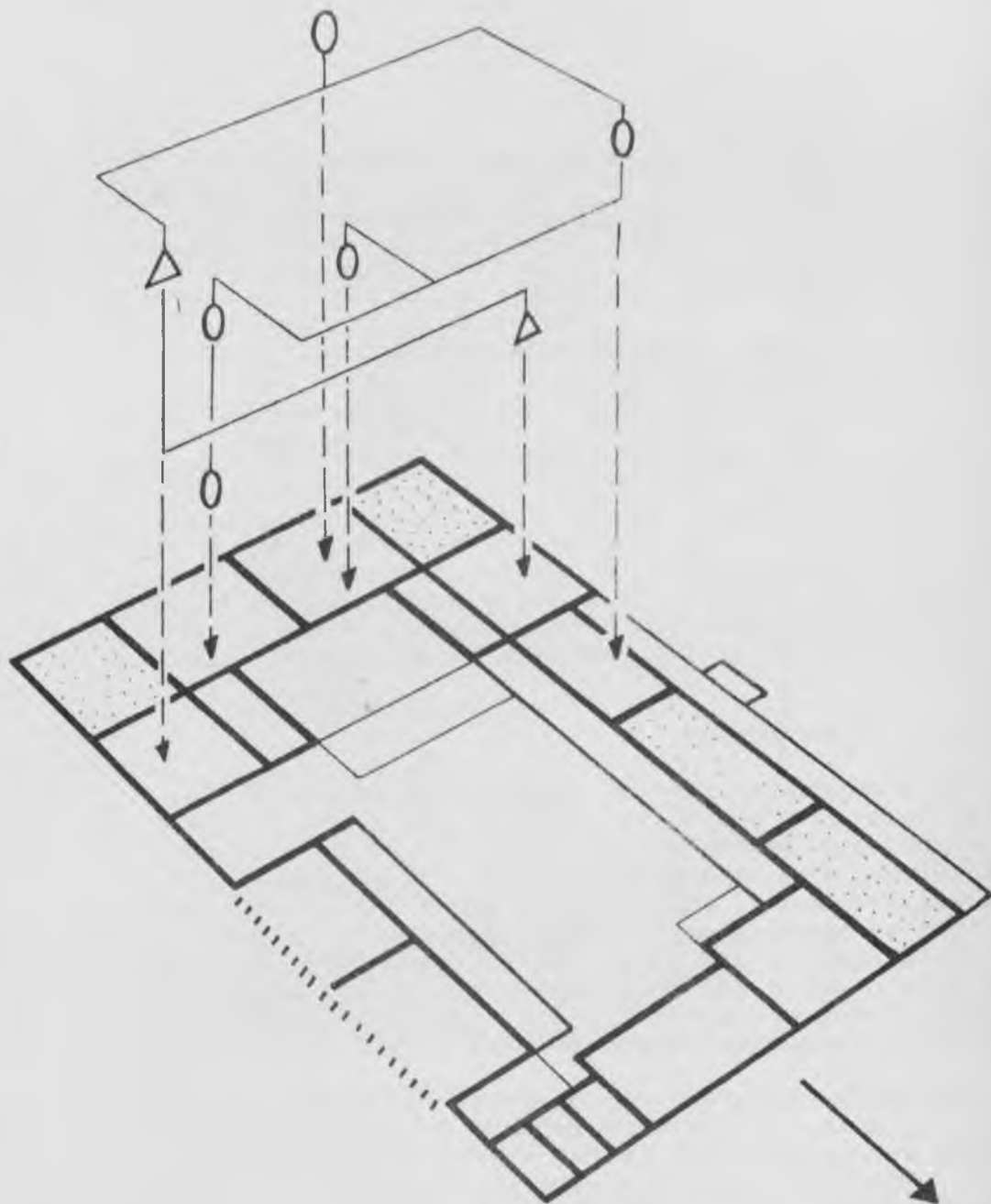


Fig 5. Location of Kin. Ashanti House. Agogo.
Schematic Block Diagram.

0 5 10 15 20 25 METRES

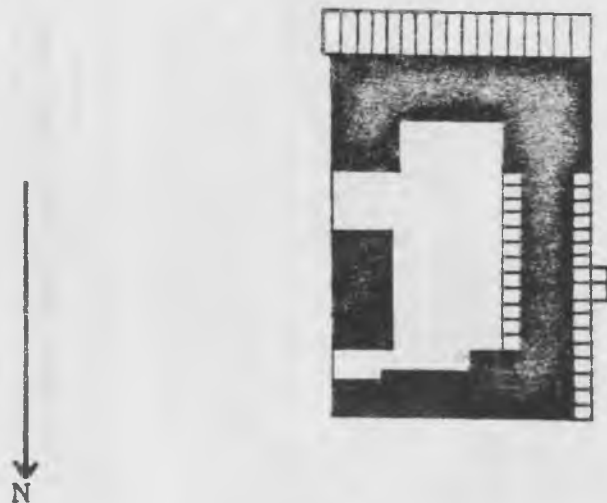


Fig 6. Ashanti House. Agogo.

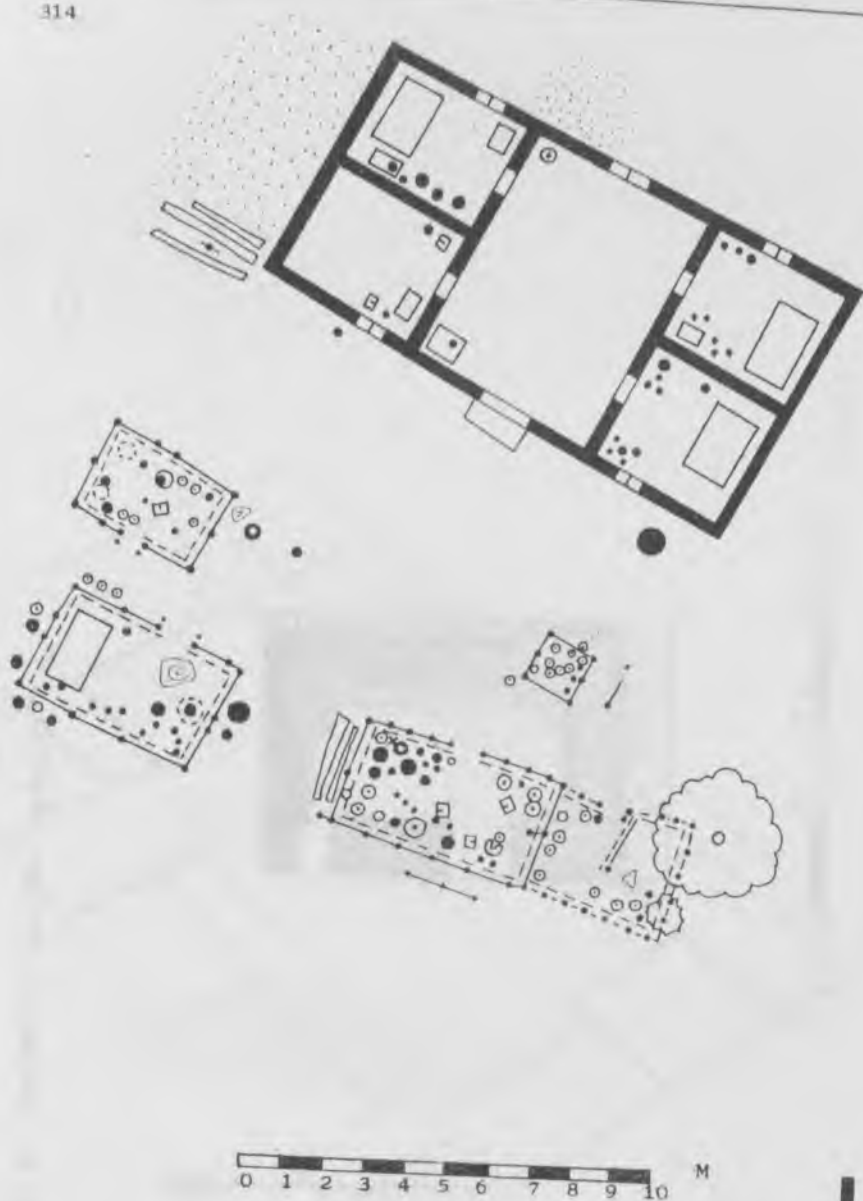


Fig 7. Ewe House. Aduklu Kpatove Volta Region

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In general, each mature woman has her own fireplace in these houses. In the Agogo house there are five fireplaces in the kitchen, which is at the north end of the house. The two fireplaces at the west end are used by the strangers who use the two large rooms in the west wing. The central fireplace is used by the school children of the house. The sister of the house owner has the next fireplace, which is set farther out on the kitchen floor. At the east end of the kitchen is the fireplace used by the owner's sister's daughter to produce food for herself and her grandmother.

There are two fireplaces in the Fante house, both used by the widow. The fireplace under the verandah can be used when rain prevents the use of the one in the court. There does not seem to be any regular place in the house where the wives of the widow's sons can cook. They seem to use coal-pots on the verandah of the east block or in their rooms. In the Ewe house (fig. 10), the only mature woman is the owner's wife. Like the wife of the owner of the other Ewe house she has her own kitchen in a post-built hut. The wife of each house owner has her fireplace in the kitchen. In the house (fig. 7) the small stand between the big kitchen and the main house, could be used to cover an outside fireplace for the owner's wife. Such an arrangement occurs in other houses in Adoklu Kpatove. In the house (figs 7, 8) the son's wife need obtain food only for herself, as her husband is working away from Adoklu Kpatove. The owner's sister has her own kitchen to the south of the hut where she sleeps.

Man and wife may either occupy the same room in the Ewe and Fante houses or use separate rooms. From fig. 8, it can be seen that the oldest male in the house has a room separate from his wife, but the son, who lives in the north east room of the main building shares his room with his wife. In the Fante house the woman in the north wing is a widow, but had previously occupied the same room as her husband. The two men who use the large rooms in the eastern block of this house live with their wives. The Agogo house represents one of the types of household arrangement defined by Fortes (1948;4-6,149-79). The owner of the house lives separately from the other parent of his children. The same applies to the owner's sister. In neither case does the other parent live within the

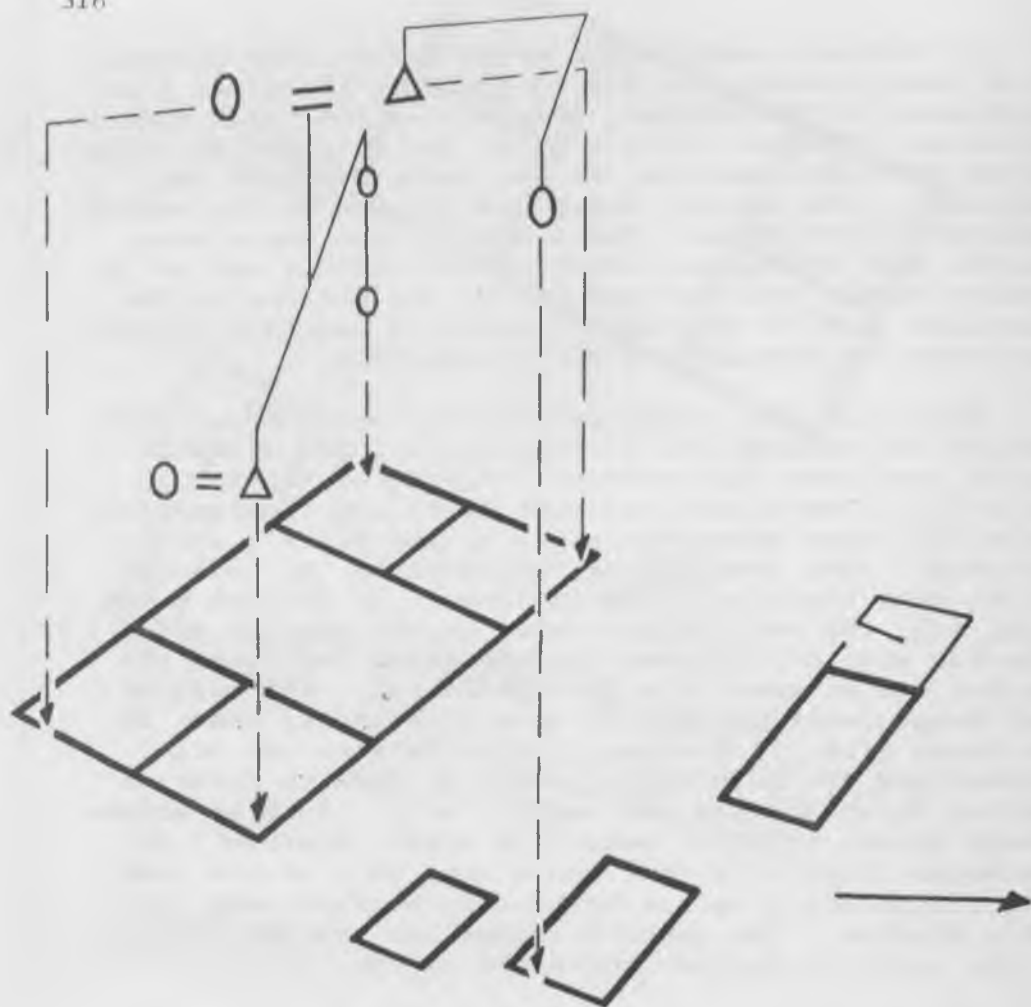


Fig 8. Location of Kin. Ewe House. (see Fig 7) Aduklu Kpatove Schematic Block Diagram.

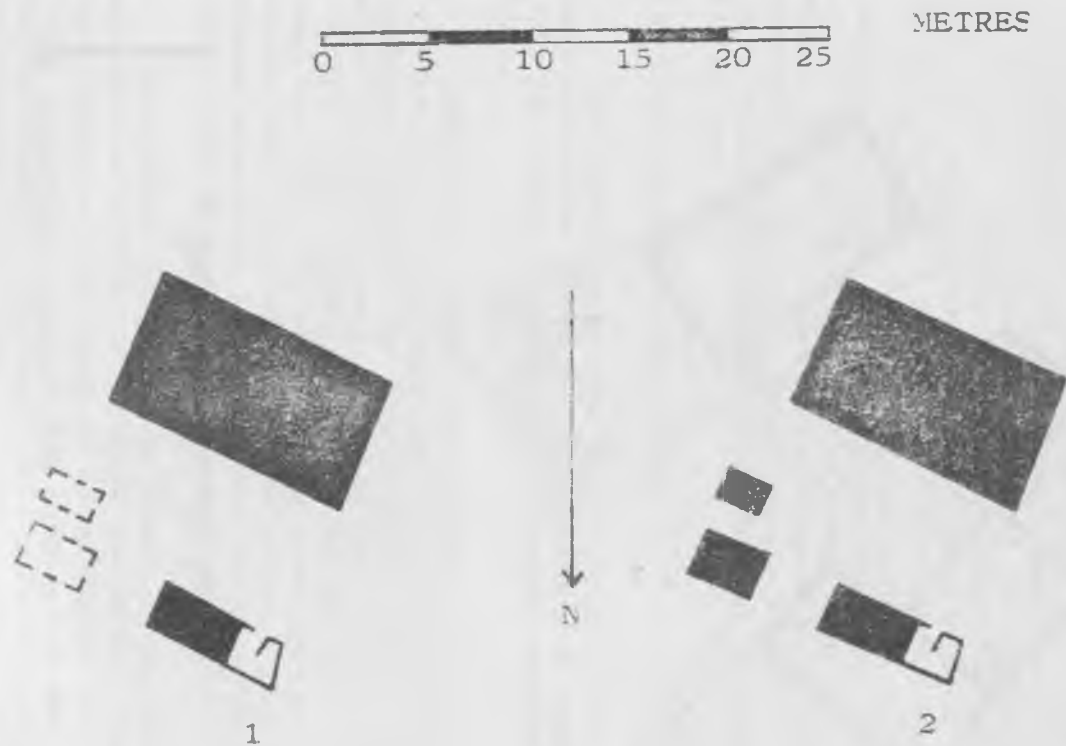


Fig 9. Development of Ewe House (see Fig 7) Aduklu Kpatove



Fig 10. Ewe House. Aduklu Kpatove. Volta Region

house.

Young children would sleep in their mother's room in all four of the houses, though in the Fante house some of these children also sleep in the outer room of the north wing (fig. 2). The other multiple residence cases are the young unmarried boys, who occupy the room at the west end of the north wing of the house. Groups of young children in Aduklu Kpatove may also occupy a room separate from their mother, but this situation does not arise in either of the houses I illustrate. A situation where two people of adjacent generations occupy a room occurs in the Agogo house with the owner's mother and her niece (fig. 5). The three communities (however) seem prepared to tolerate three generations of occupants in a house, and may actually intend to achieve such a situation.

The Development of the House

The Agogo house was built as one unit and has only undergone minor repairs since its construction. Only the owner's mother has changed residence location.

Extension in the Fante house (fig. 3) has been carried out by the addition of groups of rooms. The separate house to the west, first defined the west edge of the original court of the house I am describing. The addition of the north wing was carried out when the sons of the now-deceased man were mature and required their own rooms. The second L shaped structure was therefore built to house the owner, his wife and their young children.

Development of the Ewe house is based on the aggregation either of a large building containing several rooms or the addition of a single hut, without there necessarily being any structural link between the buildings. The basic unit consists of a main building and a kitchen in both houses. In the house (figs 8, 9) development proceeded by the addition of a residence/kitchen group, when the owner's sister joined his house. In the other Ewe house (figs. 11, 12) the development involved the construction of a larger main building as the number of children

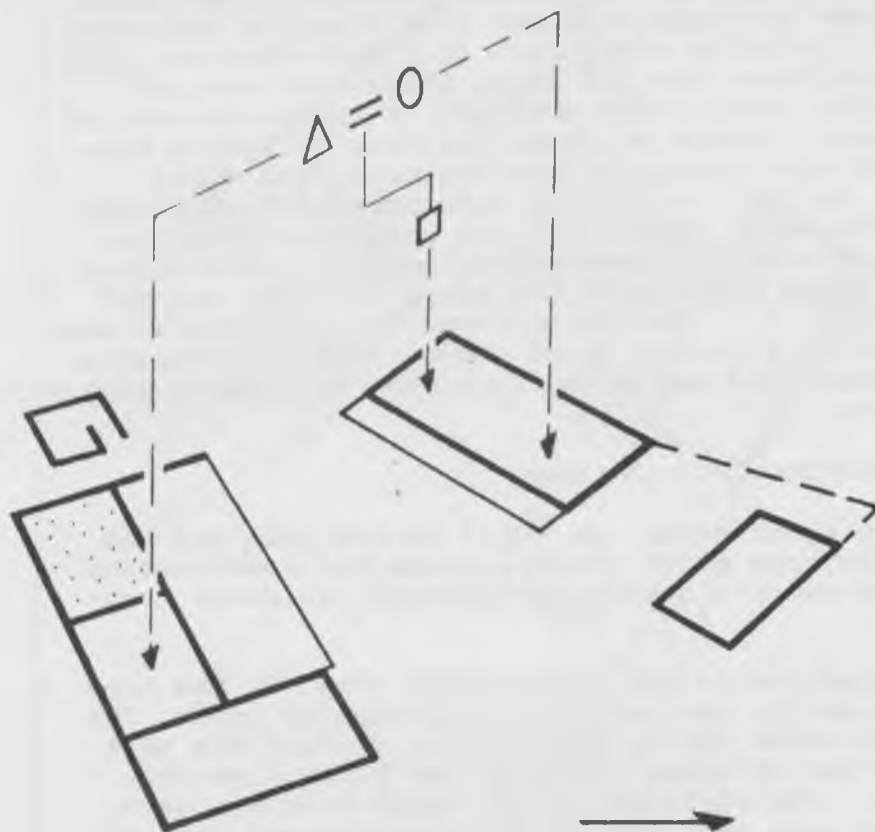
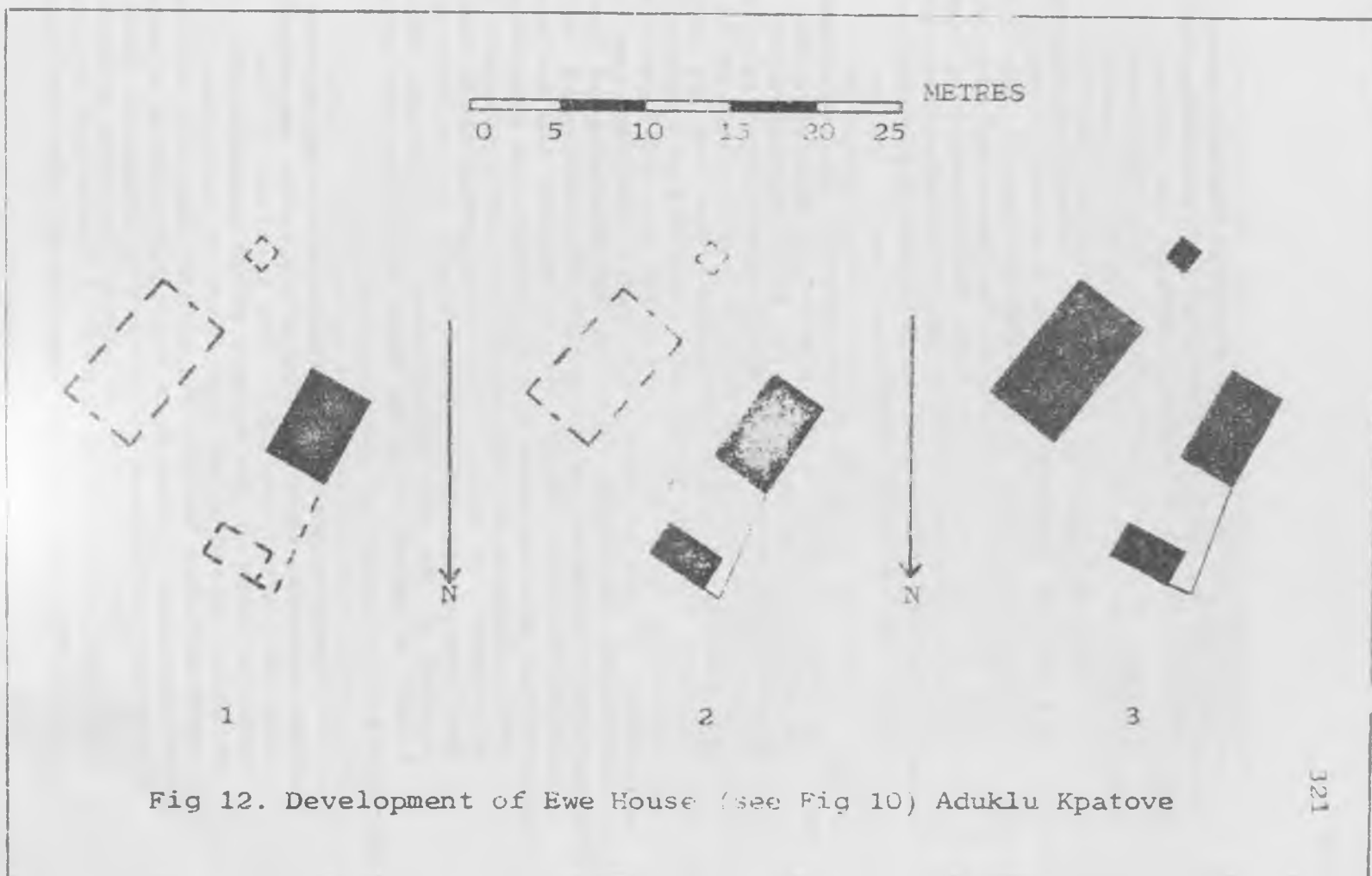


Fig 11. Location of Kin. Ewe House (see Fig 10) Aduklu Kpatove Schematic Block Diagram.



increased along with the economic need for more storage space. The old main building was then given another use as the wife's room.

Comment

The diagrams of the Fante, Ashanti and Ewe houses give an impression of the framework in which various types of family arrangements occur. The frame is provided by the walls of the house but also by such factors as the location and frequency of occurrence of artefacts within the structure; the places where people prefer to sit and the relationship of public and private routes.

In the study of house form and its relationship to family structure one problem is to assess the relationship between all the attributes involved in an occupied house. One would expect these attributes to be functionally coherent with each other unless the social situation being considered has had insufficient time to attain any coherence and ensure its continued existence. This issue in itself could be a source of varied interpretations. One then has to consider the degree to which the character of the various attributes is defined by the functional influence of the other attributes, or whether the features such as artefact location and house form are independently defined by the communities' notions about the arrangement of space. The latter would imply that the form of the house cannot simply be regarded as a product of the activities occurring within it, but is itself a factor to which those activities are adjusted.

A senior person in a house may occupy a room that visually dominates the other rooms, so reinforcing the person's status. The position of the owner's rooms in the Ashanti house dominates the court by being raised up on a platform at one corner of the court and also forming one side of the only entrance to the house. House form might also define a person's location preferences and proxemics behaviour (Hall, 1966). Since in early childhood the house provides the frame within which the child learns how to locate itself and recognise the location of other entities.

The result of both these processes would be the replication of the house form by the succeeding generation, but also the replication of the social ranking and spacing pattern. The relationship between different combinations of family type and house form might therefore be considered in terms of the reinforcement and replication mechanisms involved.

As well as possessing functional coherence the attributes of an occupied house can be regarded as arrangements of people, objects, and structures, conforming to classifications that might have a logical coherence, since they constitute the view of reality of one community. The diverse, possible arrangements of seating, object location and structures can be observed in figs. 1, 4, 7, 10. The relationship of family type and house form can then be considered in terms of the various conceptions of reality used by different societies. Studies of functional and concept coherence require the analysis of a large number of houses from a community, if possible every available example, in order to identify the various patterns occurring within the community. It will also be possible to assess the range of variability for each pattern, to obtain an index of the tolerance of variation of the community in the behaviour of its members. This provides a more detailed assessment of house and family arrangements than is given by the description of a "typical" house.

Note

1. The indeterminacy is caused by the deserted houses that are no longer being maintained even though some are used for storage, and by the occurrence of widely separated house owned by one man.

References

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Fig 13. KEY

	Block		Box/table
	Wall		Fireplace (Fante)
	Temporary Wall		Fireplaces (Ashanti)
	Broken Wall		Fireplace (Ewe)
	Door		Pottery Vessel
	Blocked door		Metal Vessel
	Window		Gourd
	Small Window		Basket
	Step		Grindstone
	Bench		Mortar
	Platform		Pestle
	Low Platform		Timber
	Depression		Stone
	Drains		Figs. 3,4,9,12.
	Post		Building
	Verandah		Position of Building
	Timber Wall & Post		Wall
	Timber hutch		Verandah
	Stand		Figs. 2,5,8,11.
	Unfinished Stand		Male
	Edge of stand cover		Male (Deceased)
	Garden Fence		Female
	Fence		Children
	Screen		Marriage
	Tree		Residence Location
	Gully		Occupied by Stranger
	Path		Wall
	Dump		Verandah
	Bed		Platform
	Bench		Slope
	Chair/stool		Fence

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